Seizure of trucks loaded with smuggled betel nuts

†2849. SHRI MANGANI LAL MANDAL: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the customs officials of Patna had and seized four trucks loaded with smuggled betel nuts on 31st August, 2003 and 17th September, 2003 respectively which were later on set free by the Ministry *vide* its order dated 5th November, 2003 without having conducted an appropriate enquiry;

(b) whether it is also a fact that the Commissioner of customs, Patna had given a reward of Rupees fifty thousand to the informer for this purpose; and

(c) if so, what are the details in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI S. S. PALANIMANICKAM): (a) Yes, Sir. It is a fact that four trucks loaded with betel nuts were seized on 31.8.2003 and 17.9.2003. On an examination of the Chief Commissioner's report and the accompanying documents, the Ministry was satisfied that in the facts and circumstances of the case the seizure was not warranted. The seized goods were therefore released *vide* order dated 5.11.2003.

(b) and (c) Yes, Sir. An amount of Rs. 50,000/-was disbursed as advance reward to the informer.

Status report on external debt

2850. SHRI EKANATH K. THAKUR: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that as per the status report on external debt released by his Ministry, India's indebtedness rose by $8.1 billion to $121 billion in 2004 as compared to $112.8 billion the year before; and

(b) whether it is also a fact that among the top ten debtor countries, India's position was less precarious than others in terms of other indicators?

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi